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Maintaining High-Level Focus on Nuclear Security

Mark Fitzpatrick & Jasper Pandza

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mark Fitzpatrick is the Director of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Programme at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Mr. Fitzpatrick joined IISS in 2005 after a distinguished 26-year career in the US Department of State, where for the previous ten years he focused on nonproliferation issues. In his last posting, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Nonproliferation, responsible for policies to address the proliferation problems posed by Iran, North Korea, Libya, Iraq, South Asia and other regions of concern. Mr. Fitzpatrick had previously served for four years at the US Mission to International Organizations in Vienna, including as Charge d'Affairs and as Counselor for Nuclear Policy, in charge of liaison with the International Atomic Energy Agency. In previous State Department postings, he headed the South Asia Regional Affairs Office, responsible for nonproliferation and security policies regarding India and Pakistan; served as special assistant to Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott; headed the Political-Military Branch of the US Embassy in Tokyo; served as North Korea desk officer; and held postings in South Korea and New Zealand. Mr. Fitzpatrick received a Master in Public Policy from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Jasper Pandza is a research analyst with the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Programme at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). He joined IISS in September 2010 under the Stanton Nuclear Security Fellowship programme. He is currently enrolled as a Ph.D. student at King's College London where he is exploring the role of communication in preventing, preparing for, and responding to radiological terrorism. He holds a B.Sc. in Physics and a M.A. in Science & Security from King's College. His research responsibilities include nuclear and radiological security issues, particularly with a view to the Nuclear Security Summit series.

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Maintaining High-Level Focus On Nuclear Security

Mark Fitzpatrick and Jasper Pandza
The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)

This paper explores how nuclear security can be maintained at the top of the international agenda following the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul and the third summit to be held in 2014 in the Netherlands. The attention of senior government officials may be vital to catalyzing the implementation of national nuclear security commitments. But continuing the summit process beyond 2014 requires finding novel topics that capture world leaders' attention and willingness to making the necessary bureaucratic commitments. Alternatives to a series of summits include adding nuclear security to the G-8 or G-20 agendas or integrating it into the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. The need for continued summitry on this topic would be clearer if there was an empirically based system for tracking nuclear security efforts. The minimalist method for tracking national commitments that has been decided for the Seoul conference is not the best method for assessing the status of nuclear security internationally.

INTRODUCTION

With final preparations underway for the Seoul Nuclear Security Summit (NSS), the question arises of how the beneficial momentum of the summit can be sustained beyond 2012. At the time of writing this paper, the news has just broken that a third summit will take place in the Netherlands in 2014. Dutch foreign affairs minister Uri Rosenthal has written to Members of Parliament that the Netherlands has accepted South Korea's request to host the third NSS,¹ but the official decision will be taken in Seoul. A number of countries had been voicing support for a final third summit in 2014 to coincide with the end of President Obama's four-year effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material in the world. Beyond a third summit in 2014, there is no interest among world leaders to make the summit a permanent fixture on the international nuclear agenda. But the future is not preordained and circumstances could change in ways that demand their further concentrated attention to nuclear security requirements. This paper thus does not take it as axiomatic that 2014 will be the last of the nuclear security summits. Recognizing that the summit process is likely come to an end, however, it explores alternatives to that process.

The question of whether and how high-level nuclear security meetings might continue will depend on knowledge about the need. The original 2010 NSS in Washington, DC, highlighted the dangers of nuclear terrorism, but there is no established system for gauging the severity of the danger or the progress in plugging the gaps. Even tracking implementation of commitments made in 2010 has proven to be a challenge. Establishing a system for assessing nuclear security conditions worldwide would be much harder, but it would provide valuable guidance for high-level political decisions on nuclear security. Hence, this paper also considers a number of options for tracking national commitments.

Although the issues explored are mainly matters of process, it is important to keep the goal in mind. The various initiatives, conventions, and programs launched in the nuclear security field all share the purpose of preventing a nuclear or radiological terrorist attack. What matters most is that tangible improvements

are made in securing nuclear and radiological materials, in protecting borders from illicit trafficking, and in creating a stronger norm to prevent terrorists from acquiring those materials. The 2010 and 2012 Nuclear Security Summits were convened to coordinate these efforts and catalyze further progress.

THE VALUE OF SUMMITS

The value of international summitry was clearly demonstrated in April 2010. The Washington Nuclear Security Summit focused global attention, established widespread support for the far-reaching goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear material in four years, and stimulated lower-level officials to overcome bureaucratic impediments to progress.² In short, the summit engendered attention, vision, and priority.

To be morbidly frank, the most effective incentive to action would be the very kind of cataclysmic event that nuclear security measures are designed to prevent. The low-probability/high consequences scenario of a premeditated nuclear attack by terrorists would be a global game-changer. The more likely possibility of a sabotage attack against a nuclear plant with consequences akin to Fukushima or a more simple detonation of a radiological dirty bomb that caused distress and disruption would also stimulate immediate efforts to prevent repeat attacks. Short of such dreadful stimuli, summits have proven to be the best way for driving forward meaningful progress.

The Washington summit served to educate both officials and the wider public about the threat of nuclear terrorism and the steps necessary to reduce the danger. One should not exaggerate the effect. There was no consensus among participating countries about the nature of the threat and how it ranked in comparison to other nuclear dangers: weapons proliferation, weapons arsenals, and nuclear accidents. Yet the convening of 47 leaders, including 39 heads-of-state, to discuss this one topic ensured that policy responses would be given higher priority. The disparate international institutions that currently are in place to address nuclear security are mostly technical. Legal and technical experts can draft conventions and devise programs, but political will is needed for states to adopt such measures and provide the resources necessary to fulfill goals. The nuclear security summit is a means for summoning that political will on an international scale and driving forward the agenda. Top-level attention is the best way to overcome bureaucratic inertia, coordinate across department boundaries, and build the political and technical capacity for concrete action. There is nothing like a summit to secure national commitments, budgetary outlays, and the implementation of pledges.

The “house gift” concept maximized the value of the Washington summit. Creating the expectation that leaders should come to the summit with concrete commitments accelerated national efforts, even if such measures had already been the pipeline or were the focus of bilateral consultations.

More abstractly, the Washington summit strengthened the international norm of nuclear security. As articulated by US nuclear expert William Tobey, the norm is that “nations should constantly be looking to improve their efforts in this field—and conversely that no nation should be complacent about the status quo.”³ He argues that the approach to nuclear security must be based on seeking continual improvement to meet an evolving threat.⁴ However, norms need time to evolve. It is doubtful whether this “culture of security” has seeped down through the bureaucracy of all countries involved.

The US hosts selected the 2010 summit participants on the basis of pragmatic considerations, to bridge traditional divides in nuclear diplomacy. India, Israel, and Pakistan were able to participate in the nuclear security summit fully, with no hint of second-tier status by virtue of their not having signed the Nuclear

Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The steps necessary to enhance nuclear security are unrelated to the NPT, which does not even mention the subject. Nuclear security also does not make a distinction between nuclear armed and unarmed states, other than that the former bear a higher responsibility to keep their weapons and military fissile material out of terrorist reach.

Not every state with nuclear facilities was invited to Washington and Seoul. Among those with fissile material holdings, Belarus, Iran, North Korea, and Uzbekistan were excluded. The selective invitation list has been criticized by some states on the grounds of fairness and legitimacy. Iran took up rhetorical cudgels against its exclusion, calling the summit “humiliating to humanity.”⁵ North Korea’s late leader Kim Jong Il was invited to the Seoul summit, in the clear knowledge that he would not accept, and not only because the invitation was conditioned on his agreeing to give up his nuclear weapons. Kim Jong Il never agreed to hold North-South summits in the Republic of Korea for fear both of personal safety and of losing political face by exposing his countrymen and women to the untold luxuries of the South. South Korea reiterated its invitation following Kim Jong Un’s succession, but for the same reasons there is no chance that the North’s inexperienced new leader will attend. Belarus was invited on the condition that it remove its stockpile of highly enriched uranium (HEU), a condition Minsk agreed to after the 2010 summit but subsequently retracted (see below).

The selective invitation list has important advantages in terms of effectiveness. The exclusion of problematic states allowed for a problem-free summit and for consensus on the Communiqué and Work Plan. Assembling a collection of like-minded states in an ad-hoc setting avoided the disadvantage of forums like the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament where one country with a disparate national agenda can for years block any form of progress on discussing a fissile material cut-off treaty. Iran’s defiance of the UN Security Council mandate to suspend enrichment-related activities, its disruptive behavior at the 2007 NPT Preparatory Committee meeting,⁶ and the inflammatory speeches of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the UN General Assembly,⁷ gave summit organizers little reason to believe that inviting Iran would contribute to a productive meeting. In the case of Belarus, the exclusion provided leverage, at least for a while, over HEU removal.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SEQUEL

The 2010 Washington summit was the first international high-level meeting to exclusively focus on preventing nuclear terrorism. Announced by Barack Obama in his signature speech on nuclear policy in Prague in April 2009, the summit was initially conceived of as a one-off event. When President Obama visited Moscow that June and talked up the idea, Dmitry Medvedev volunteered to host a follow-on summit. Substantive and political logic both supported the suggestion for a sequel session in Moscow. Russia and its former Soviet partners have been the focus of much of the global effort to secure fissile material, with the US and Russia as collaborative partners in the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program on which the US had spent more than \$8 billion.⁸ The “re-set” in US-Russia relations at the beginning of the Obama Administration provided the impetus for expanded cooperation on several fronts.

As preparations for the 2010 summit moved forward, however, the plan for a follow-up confab in Moscow ran aground on the shoals of bureaucracy. When President Medvedev volunteered, he had in mind an event in 2011. White House officials thought a two-year summit interval made more sense, but the Russians could not commit to that given the presidential elections scheduled for March 2012. Indeed,

it has now transpired that Vladimir Putin will return to the presidency. Given the organizational demands in connection with hosting the winter Olympics, the Russians also may have been concerned about their capacity to host another high-profile international event. In any case, the sequel to most blockbusters is rarely as big a hit.

To Washington's relief and Seoul's credit, the Republic of Korea stepped in at the eleventh hour and offered to host an interim summit at the halfway mark. Responding favorably to the American leader's request, President Lee Myung-bak saw hosting the summit as another way for his country to make its mark on the world scene. After hosting the G-20 summit in November 2010, convening world leaders for a second nuclear security summit would firmly establish the Republic of Korea as a global player, lending credence to Lee's foreign policy catch phrase of "Global Korea." Given South Korea's dependence on nuclear energy and its organizational prowess, it was a perfect choice. Few countries have more at stake in ensuring that nuclear power is both safe and secure. Moreover, putting the second summit in the hands of a country that possesses no nuclear weapons had symbolic importance, demonstrating that nuclear security is a global issue that is unrelated to Cold War rivalries or nuclear weapon state status. The well-kept secret was announced at the end of the 2010 meeting, adding to the importance of the Washington event. The nuclear security summit had become a process, not just a unique event.

The core purpose of the Seoul summit is to follow up on the commitments made in Washington, the "house gifts," and the 2010 Work Plan, which entail an ambitious and comprehensive agenda. It makes sense to ensure that the commitments agreed to in 2010 are translated from paper into action in an acceptable timeframe. Announcing the follow-up meeting created a strong sense of momentum with the second summit playing the role of an action-forcing event that would ensure the continued personal involvement of world leaders.

Subsequently, important topics that were not addressed in the 2010 meeting were added to the 2012 agenda. The most significant of these issues is radiological security. This topic had been omitted in order to keep the agenda manageable and perhaps also to avoid drawing attention to America's own shortcomings in securing radioactive sources. Another topic added to the agenda, promoted by the United Kingdom, was protecting sensitive nuclear knowledge and information, otherwise known as nuclear security intangibles, which received only brief mention in the 2010 summit work plan. The nuclear disaster at Fukushima ensured that the intersection between nuclear security and nuclear safety would also be addressed in Seoul. For the participation list, three new countries have been added at the January 2012 sherpa meeting in New Delhi: Denmark, Lithuania, and Azerbaijan. Interpol was added to the international organizations attending the session because of its role in providing states with intelligence analysis and information about illicit trafficking of nuclear and radiological materials obtained via its own channels pooled with information from the IAEA. As noted above, an invitation was also extended to North Korea, but only as a non-serious political gesture.

CHALLENGES OF CONTINUING THE SUMMIT PROCESS BEYOND 2012

Having discussed the issue at every planning meeting, the governments involved in the summit process do not appear to envision permanent, biannual meetings. Following the third meeting in 2014, US officials expect that this one will be the last such session. The major obstacle to continuing the summit process in its current form is the need to find a unique and clearly definable purpose for each event in order to continue to attract interest among world leaders and their bureaucracies. The process is in danger

of running out of bold new ideas that can capture attention as well as realistic potential to bring about tangible results. Additionally, summit fatigue is a frequently voiced complaint among participating states. The process is costly in terms of both money and leaders' time. Bureaucrats in many countries have a hard time justifying nuclear security as an issue worthy of the time of the head-of-state, especially since various other nuclear security initiatives are already underway.

Some officials privately confess that they can rationalize their contribution to summits internally only as a way for leaders to spend time with President Obama. Moreover, there have been rumors that face time with the American president was all that some leaders think they got out of the Washington meeting and it was also apparently the quid pro quo for some of the national commitments made at that summit. While still a factor in attracting heads-of-state to Seoul, the value of face time with the American leader decreases over time. It was highest when his visage was new and his image popular at home and abroad. In April 2010 President Obama was also still basking in the wave of enthusiasm over his Prague speech on disarmament and the steps that followed, including the New START arms control agreement with Russia and the changes to US nuclear policy outlined in the March 2010 Nuclear Security Review. The enthusiasm for his nuclear agenda is receding as the Prague memory grows dim.

Some observers argue that it is a waste of political resources for leaders to meet just to talk about nuclear security when they have other pressing priorities, including the global financial crisis. Even on the nuclear agenda, not all countries see nuclear security as the main threat. Chinese participants at an October 2011 IISS workshop on nuclear security argued that the Seoul summit should deal with a broader agenda of risks, including nuclear safety and proliferation issues.⁹ All of these issues face similar political hurdles, and need high-level leadership to overcome bureaucratic and financial impediments to progress.

Opposition to continuing the NSS process also stems from concern in some countries that the nuclear security agenda threatens to overshadow the NPT and to undermine the efforts of the IAEA in this area. Fearing that the process would detract from the importance of disarmament and the sharing of nuclear technology for economic development as well as that it would create new obligations under the nonproliferation regime, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) states, in particular, argued against the idea, floated by the UK Cabinet Office in July 2009¹⁰ and briefly picked up by the US,¹¹ that nuclear security should become a "fourth pillar" of the NPT. The Cabinet Office apparently introduced the "fourth pillar" language without fully thinking through the consequences for NPT politics, and it has not been used again.¹² But concerns about disproportionate emphasis on nuclear security are still raised by developing countries and countries associated with the NAM.¹³

Some arguments against the NSS process have come from the opposite end of the political spectrum. Former Bush Administration nonproliferation official Christopher Ford has argued that the high-profile nature of the Washington summit created a moral hazard by "in effect commoditizing the retention of dangerous nuclear materials." He contends that it gave leverage to states such as Belarus who then believe their fissile material can command a higher cost.¹⁴ It is true that President Alexander Lukashenko sought to leverage the country's stockpile of highly enriched uranium for political purpose. He agreed to transfer Belarus' stockpile to secure facilities in Russia before March 2012 on the understanding that he would be invited to Seoul. Before the shipments were halfway completed, the deal fell apart in August 2011 when the EU and US imposed sanctions on Belarus over human rights violations in the aftermath of protests over a rigged election. But to claim that President Lukashenko broke the deal because of the status accorded the HEU by the Nuclear Security Summit is groundless speculation. Because of the summit process, 84 kg of HEU was safely removed.¹⁵ The sanctions imposed after the violent repression by Belarus security forces probably would have sparked a suspension of the deal to ship the remaining 100

kg regardless of whether the NSS process had raised the profile of the material.

Whether to continue or end the NSS process should be an explicit decision made after systematic consideration, rather than allowing inertia or indirection to guide. Circumstances may change, of course, to either give impetus to continued high-level attention or to solidify an inclination that the nuclear summitry impulse has been satisfied. Meanwhile, the criteria for deciding to continue the process should include a clearer understanding of the threat of nuclear and radiological terrorism. Ideally, decision-makers should share a greater consensus on the extent to which the problem still exists and how important it is compared to other problems. China, for example, judges nuclear disarmament to be just as important as nuclear security, and in the aftermath of Fukushima, it also accords safety a top priority.

In addition to reaching an understanding on the nature of the problem and its relative importance, decision-makers must assess the relative value of summitry in reducing the danger. After all, a number of mechanisms have already been established to address the nuclear security problem. They include:

- The Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM), which protects nuclear material during international transport (entered into force in 1987) and a 2005 amendment to the convention (not yet in force) which extends its coverage to make it legally obligatory to protect nuclear facilities and material in peaceful domestic use and storage.
- A set of US Cooperative Threat Reductions programs which began in 1991.¹⁶
- UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004), which obligates states to take measures to prohibit non-state actors from obtaining nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, in particular for terrorist purposes.
- The IAEA Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources (2003), and supplementary Guidance on the Import and Export of Radioactive Sources (2004). IAEA guidance is not legally binding, but it is intended to give countries practical support to controlling radioactive sources in civilian use.
- The International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005), which requires state parties to criminalize acts related to nuclear terrorism in national legislation.
- IAEA technical guidelines published in INFCIRC/225 in the Agency's Nuclear Security Series (launched in 2006), intended to help states establish a coherent nuclear security infrastructure.
- The US- and Russia-led Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT) (2006) to facilitate nuclear security best practice sharing.
- The G-8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (2002), which pledged to raise \$20 billion (\$10 bn from the US and \$10 bn from other partners) over ten years to alleviate threats from WMD.
- Establishment in 2008 of the World Institute for Nuclear Security (WINS) to bring together nuclear security experts, the nuclear industry, governments, and international organizations to focus on improvement of security at global nuclear facilities.

Most of these mechanisms, however, are technical or provide funding while the purpose of the summit process is to coordinate disparate measures and to lend political weight to enable technical solutions. As stated by US sous sherpa Laura Holgate: The role of the summits is “to use these focused opportunities

for national leadership attention to expand, elaborate, elevate, and energize the existing nuclear security infrastructure in all its diversity and complexity. If we are successful, we will leave behind a more comprehensive, better coordinated, and increasingly capable global system for nuclear security.”¹⁷

The impact of the summit in spurring ratification of international instruments dealing with nuclear security is a case in point. In the run-up to the 2010 summit, five states completed their national processes for ratifying the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material in order to count it as a summit “deliverable.”¹⁸ In the year and a half after the 2010 Summit, eight other participants accepted the Amendment to the CPPNM and six became parties to the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. A number of other states accelerated work to complete their internal processes on ratifying these measures.

Despite the political pressure exerted by the 2010 summit, there remains much room for making progress on nuclear security. In terms of treaty ratification, for example, entry into force of the amendment to the CPPNM is perhaps the most important short-term step to be taken. As of December 2011, only 15 of the 25 states that originally proposed the measure have adopted the Amendment to the CPPNM. Of the 47 countries represented at the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit, five are not party to the CPPNM, 24 have not adopted the amendment to the CPPNM,¹⁹ and four are not party to the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.²⁰

A vital factor when it comes to continuing the summit process is to ensure public buy-in. Public understanding about the terrorism threat and the measures taken to counter it legitimizes decisions made at summits and the spending of taxpayer’s money to strengthen nuclear security. With a number of countries reconsidering or even ending their nuclear energy programs following the Fukushima disaster as a result of popular pressure, public understanding clearly matters if the option of nuclear energy is to be kept open. The Korean hosts are keen to engage the public through the 2012 summit, as demonstrated by the publication of an accessible glossy summit brochure, the release of an official Seoul summit theme song by popular singer Lena Park,²¹ and the launch of an informative summit website.²² Korea also intends to address nuclear safety issues in 2012—at the very least through the lens of security. The Fukushima disaster could indeed be a useful analogy for communicating the purpose of the summit and the efforts it seeks to coordinate, especially if so many world leaders gather on the anniversary of the disaster. On the other hand, when it comes to formulating public messages related to nuclear and radiological security, it is important to avoid presenting the threat in a way that may give terrorist groups greater incentive to exploit an apparent vulnerability.

THE LOGIC OF A TRILOGY: A 2014 SUMMIT IN THE NETHERLANDS

The hosts of the second summit had been extremely keen that a third meeting should be held in 2014 and will now be glad to have found a host. A formal decision made at the 2012 summit to reconvene in the Netherlands will be a measure of success of the second summit and a validation of its purpose. From the beginning, the Koreans have envisioned the Seoul summit as a way station to a concluding event in 2014 and as a cornerstone to a longer-term process of strengthening nuclear security.

The choice of the Netherlands as host is not entirely surprising. The Dutch government has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening nuclear security by leading the GICNT working group on nuclear detection and by preparing the topic of nuclear forensics for the Seoul summit. A European location is convenient and logical, following locations in North America and East Asia.

In a way, however, the Dutch are gambling that high-level political interest in nuclear security will continue regardless of the outcome of America's November 2012 presidential election. If President Obama were to be ousted by a Republican challenger, the new US president might be less likely to lend his personal weight to his predecessor's signature initiative. Should a Republican president not lend the same importance to the nuclear security summit process, the 2014 meeting might find it hard to attract the same number of heads-of-state. On the other hand, nuclear security is not a politically contentious issue in the US or elsewhere. Efforts to counter nuclear terrorism enjoy strong bipartisan support in Washington.

With regard to substance, it is too early to determine the thematic priorities the Dutch government will choose for the 2014 summit. At the very least, it would serve as a punctuation point for the four-year goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear material that President Obama announced in Prague. The summit will maintain the momentum toward this goal, again serving as an action-forcing event to ensure the completion of national commitments and tasks laid out in the 2010 summit work plan, and to verify achievement of those steps. Not all vulnerable nuclear material will be secured by 2014, of course. The political and technical challenges to transfer weapon-grade materials between countries and to implement adequate physical protection are in many cases quite substantial and take time to complete. Moreover, nobody has a clear picture of how much vulnerable nuclear material exists around the world. While it makes sense to promote a concentrated effort to secure this material in a limited four-year time frame, a global nuclear security goal cannot be "achieved" at a certain date. As long as nuclear materials exist, their protection will need to be re-evaluated and updated. Other aspects of security require long-term approaches, such as training and updating designs of nuclear installations. In fact, the norm of nuclear security as an unending process of improvement militates against declaring that the goal has been met. Moving away from the "goal" language, the White House now terms it a "four-year effort."

However, it would be a missed opportunity if serving as a punctuation point for the four-year goal would be the sole purpose for convening world leaders for a third time in 2014. There should be something new on the nuclear and radiological security agenda that goes beyond the narrow scope of strengthening nuclear material security and that is credible as an organizing principle. At least two options come to mind:

- Depending on the commitments that will be made in 2012 with regards to strengthening global radiological security, the prevention of a radiological terrorist attack may serve as a guiding purpose. Radiological materials can be found in every country and for many, the risk of their malicious use appears more real than a nuclear attack. The challenge of securing radiological material is in fact so enormous that it cannot be captured in a four-year effort, given the large number of sources used throughout the world. No terrorist group has yet succeeded with such an attack and few have made a credible effort, but the reason for that seems to be a lack of motivation since the technical hurdles are much lower compared to a nuclear attack. Taking into account the significant economic and psychological impact an attack can cause, radiological security deserves the same level of attention as nuclear security.
- Facilitating the sharing of response and mitigation best practices could also be promoted as a future summit goal. The 2010 summit exclusively focused on prevention and the 2012 summit is set to do the same. But should prevention fail, it is the government's ability to quickly respond to an incident, to effectively communicate with the public, and to efficiently decontaminate affected areas that will crucially determine whether terrorists achieve their goal in causing panic and disruption.²³ There remains much potential for sharing best practices and capacities in the area of response and mitigation and this process could be accelerated through the 2014 summit.

Beyond looking for solutions to immediate nuclear and radiological security problems, it may be worth thinking bigger and considering more long-term and structural approaches to strengthening global nuclear security. “Big picture ideas” that capture the public’s and world leaders’ imaginations may equally serve as a purpose for convening summits. A number of such ideas have been put forward. In its policy recommendations for the Seoul summit, the Fissile Materials Working Group (FMWG), a Washington-based group of NGOs, calls for a new “international framework convention” that “builds on, and expands, existing principles and establishes binding baseline standards of performance for nuclear security.”²⁴ Kenneth Luongo further explains that a new framework convention could “streamline the existing components of the regime and allow new initiatives to be folded into the agreement over time,” thus simplifying the nuclear security architecture and consolidating various meeting and reporting burdens that governments are currently faced with.²⁵ Luongo acknowledges that countries may resist such fundamental change to nuclear security agreements and that multilateral negotiations may be unable to reach any conclusion. Similarly, organizers of the Seoul Nuclear Security Symposium, a side event to the 2012 Summit, are keen to consider the wider role of global governance in the nuclear security sphere. If these ideas catch on and allow for translation into actionable steps all summit participants can agree on, then they may continue to serve future summits.

ALTERNATIVES TO CONTINUING NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMITS BEYOND 2014

At present, there appears to be little governmental interest in continuing the summit process in its current form beyond the 2014 meeting. It is therefore worthwhile to consider ways to keep nuclear security high on the political agenda in the absence of summits that exclusively focus on this topic. Options include changing the current summit format and integrating nuclear security into other initiatives such as the GICNT. Both are considered in this section.

However, it is important to note that a “forcing event,” such as a nuclear terrorist attack or terrorist campaign of radiological attacks, could well lend Nuclear Security Summits their own momentum. Even without such a catastrophe, a clear understanding of the need could enable the process to evolve into a body where multilateral policy prescriptions can be negotiated and implemented. The most analogous example would be the G-8 process, which began as an informal gathering of six countries on the outskirts of Paris in the mid-1970s to address a number of global economic crises that existing multilateral institutions seemed unable to resolve. When the leaders of the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Japan met at the Chateau de Rambouillet in November 1975 for the first such summit, it was publicly cast as a one-time event,²⁶ and it was far from certain whether a follow-up meeting would take place.²⁷ Lower-level summit meetings of the finance ministers of these countries (with the exception of Italy) had taken place before, but the heads of government found higher-level meetings useful and began to hold them annually. A key difference between the evolution of the G-8 and the NSS is that the former has benefitted from a need to address a wide range of economic and security issues. Should there be an acute and continuing demand for heads-of-state to coordinate and catalyze nuclear security measures, it is possible that what began as a one-shot meeting among heads-of-state might evolve into a permanent fixture.

If that is not to be the case, then the current summit format of a dedicated, biannual meeting of heads of government may need to evolve in order to find a new compromise between the urgency of the threat and the decreasing potential for achieving meaningful results. There are, in principle, three options for changing the summit format:

- The scope of future summits could be broadened to include a direct emphasis on nuclear safety or broadened even more to include nonproliferation and disarmament. Although there are well-established international forums for these issues—the NPT review process, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, and the IAEA governing bodies—none of them involve national leaders. The broader the agenda of a summit, however, the less chance there is of meaningful decision-making. The political divisiveness over disarmament and nonproliferation topics would threaten to overshadow and undermine efforts to strengthen nuclear security.
- Summits need not take place every two years. The NPT Review Conference, for example, is quinquennial. States may be more willing to devote resources to a continued NSS process if it were held at longer intervals or intermittently, as the need arose.
- If heads-of-state cannot be persuaded to continue the NSS process, holding regular meetings at a ministerial level is a natural alternative. There is a possibility that this could happen in 2014 if such decision is made in Seoul or if President Obama were to be replaced by a Republican challenger with less interest in the subject. But a meeting of ministers will not have the same symbolic weight of political power. Cabinet ministers do not have the same ability to overcome interdepartmental turf and budgetary issues or to promote a whole-of-government approach. And purposely arranging a lower-level meeting of this nature raises its own set of bureaucratic challenges. For some countries, nuclear security falls under the purview of energy ministers, while others might prefer to be represented by foreign ministers.

Whatever the summit format, sustaining a summit process requires hosts and champions. A strong proponent like President Obama is all the more vital given the current opinion among national nuclear security negotiators that no secretariat or formal institution will be set up in support of the NSS process. Because President Obama will not be around forever, and will have other priorities if he wins a second term, and because of other reasons mentioned above, embedding nuclear security in an ongoing venture to which bureaucracies are already committed may be the best alternative. Options include integrating the summit purpose into the G-8 or G-20 summit agendas, integrating the summit purpose into the GICNT, and strengthening the political role of the IAEA. These three options are considered below.

Integrating nuclear security into the G-8 summit agenda

The NSS custodial role might be passed on to the G-8 or the G-20, where nuclear security could be made a permanent or semi-permanent agenda item on top of the other issues already discussed. One advantage of this option is that nuclear security would be addressed at heads-of-state level, while avoiding the administrative burden of a separate summit process. Nuclear security would thematically fit in better with the G-8 meetings since G-20 meetings are currently limited to economic issues and any expansion of its agenda would dilute its already limited ability to tackle the global financial crisis.

One reason advanced for passing the NSS custodial role to the G-8 is that this body already fosters the Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. There might also be practical advantages for bringing together the main forum for setting political nuclear security goals and the main implementation initiative for achieving tangible nuclear and radiological security progress under the same G-8 umbrella.

The Global Partnership has its origins in a Nuclear Safety and Security Conference held by the G-7 and Russia in Moscow in 1996, at which the participants committed to enhancing cooperation in preventing, detecting, and prosecuting the illicit trafficking of nuclear material.²⁸ But formal commitments

to secure nuclear material in the former Soviet Union, such as the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program, were often undertaken and funded on an ad-hoc basis principally by the United States and its European partners. It was not until the 9/11 attacks, which revealed to policymakers in the starkest terms the willingness of some terrorist groups to inflict mass casualties and wide-scale destruction, that G-8 leaders began to prioritize the threat that biological, chemical, radiological and nuclear weapons or materials could fall into the hands of hostile non-state actors. It was in this political environment that the G-8 Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction was established, committing those countries to pledge as much as \$20 billion over 10 years toward nuclear security initiatives. The official document establishing the Global Partnership, signed in 2002 at Kananaskis, made specific reference to programs that could take place in former Soviet Union states, including the destruction of chemical weapons, the dismantlement of decommissioned nuclear submarines, disposition of fissile materials, and the redirection of former weapons scientists. Although a Global Partnership Working Group was established to review progress on various initiatives, the Kananaskis agreement was designed to be a flexible framework, and it did not establish a new bureaucratic structure.²⁹

In the ten years since the Global Partnership's formation, progress has been made towards completing specific initiatives in Russia and Ukraine. Although funding pledges are expected to fall short of the initial \$20 billion goal, many non-monetary commitments and programs have been undertaken by donor countries through technical assistance to former Soviet Union states. In 2008 it was agreed to expand the initiative's activities worldwide, and membership has expanded beyond the G-8 to include 15 additional countries. More partners will be sought from the participants in the NSS process.³⁰ Although Germany in 2010 expressed reluctance to renew the partnership in light of fiscal austerity measures and a lack of clarity regarding future projects, the G-8 leaders agreed at the 2011 Deauville Summit to extend the initiative beyond its 2012 expiration.³¹

For all its merits, the Global Partnership itself is not a high-level forum. Nor is it structured in ways that easily galvanize heads-of-state attention. Discussions take place at the working level and are governed by the bureaucratic imperatives of the participating states. It is largely an implementation mechanism for raising and spending funds, not a political decision-making forum. The G-8 or G-20 could serve as bodies for political attention to nuclear security, but their limited membership may be insufficient to achieve the required global impact. A number of countries where nuclear security standards are considered in need of improvement such as Pakistan and countries of the former Soviet Union are not associated with the G-20 or the Global Partnership. Moreover, the broad agenda of the G-8 and G-20 summits means that nuclear security is unlikely to be a sustained priority.

Integrating the summit purpose into the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT)

A further possibility for continuing the purpose of the NSS is to boost the political profile of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. This is not an immediately obvious option. The GICNT is best known as an effective facilitator of best practice and information sharing on measures to prevent and respond to a terrorist nuclear attack. Up until June 2011, 45 GICNT events have been conducted which were open to all 82 partner nations.³² A majority of these workshops, exercises, and information sharing events focused on three priority functional areas: nuclear detection, nuclear forensics, and response and mitigation. But apart from its practical purpose, the GICNT has always had a strong political component. In order to join, nations need to formally endorse eight principles which they voluntarily commit to implement a number of broad nuclear security goals. Through June 2011, plenary meetings at the sub-cabinet level were held annually, at which partner nations evaluated progress and decided on future efforts

to combat nuclear terrorism. Plenary meetings will from now on take place biannually, with the next one scheduled for 2013 in Mexico.

Should nuclear security summits not continue beyond 2014, GICNT plenary meetings could take over as the primary global forum to advance nuclear and radiological security efforts. An advantage of this arrangement would be that it presents a step towards consolidating the nuclear security framework, a goal that has been voiced by many states and experts. Involving 82 states rather than 49 would make it harder to find consensus agreements, but it should still be manageable. For such arrangement to take place, however, the initiative would need to undertake a further transformation. Since its inception in 2006, Russia and the United States have taken important decisions with regards to the direction of the initiative as the GICNT Co-Chairs. In the future, Co-Chairs may rotate among partner nations, in order to find more legitimacy among the 82 countries. In 2010, an Implementation and Assessment Group was established, currently chaired by Spain, for the limited purpose of coordination of the practical activities carried out under the three priority functional areas. GICNT plenary meetings have so far been conducted largely outside the media spotlight. A boost in public attention, at least through the participation of foreign ministers, would be necessary to generate the governmental high-level attention that is required to drive nuclear security measures forward.

The role of the IAEA

In international discussions, it is sometimes suggested that the purpose for the NSS process could be served by strengthening the nuclear security role of the IAEA. With its universal membership and technical competence, the agency enjoys both legitimacy and authority. Indeed, at the NSS Sherpa meeting in Vienna in March 2011 there was agreement on the need to reinforce the role of the IAEA in nuclear security. The IAEA started drafting the INFCIRC/225 nuclear security guidelines in the 1970s and following the 9/11 attacks, the IAEA established the Office of Nuclear Security (NSNS). Under the Nuclear Security Plan, the NSNS assists IAEA member states to improve their nuclear security arrangements and contributes to the improvement of the nuclear security framework.³³ There are good reasons to strengthen the nuclear security role of the IAEA. Doing so as a substitute for the NSS process is not a good reason, however. No state has recommended that the IAEA should perform a secretariat function for the NSS process, which would involve the Agency preparing the summits substantively and logistically. This would require universalizing the NSS participation and agenda in line with the IAEA statute and membership, making it harder to achieve consensus. More fundamentally, the IAEA's strengths clearly lie in providing technical support to member states. The agency does not have an explicit mandate or the funding to take up a secretariat role to the nuclear security summit process.

A better way to take advantage of the Agency's competence might be to give it a nuclear security reporting function. The Agency's verification reports on countries of proliferation concern (e.g., Iran, North Korea, and Syria) and its annual safeguards implementation reports are invaluable for their unbiased assessments of problem areas and for drawing conclusions about the global status of nonproliferation obligations. However, unless IAEA nuclear security guidance were to become a legal obligation, there is very little chance that member states would agree to be similarly graded on their nuclear security efforts.

TRACKING PROGRESS

Although an IAEA verification system for nuclear security is not in the cards, it would be useful to have

at least some kind of recognized system for monitoring national and international nuclear security efforts. Such a system would also provide states with a basis for determining the need for a continued high-level focus on nuclear security, independent of whether dedicated summits are held or whether nuclear security is addressed at other high-level intergovernmental meetings. Additionally, since the goal of the 2012 NSS, and a follow-on meeting is to make tangible progress on the 2010 Work Plan commitments and national pledges, it is important to have some means of demonstrating that progress.

The United States and Republic of Korea initially proposed a matrix format for states to report on the fulfillment of their commitments in a common format. For tracking purposes, this makes eminent sense. At the Sherpa Meeting in Buenos Aires in November 2010, however, there was strong resistance to the adoption of a common reporting format. Several countries argued that as these were voluntary commitments, implementation should also be voluntary and not coercive. However exaggerated their concerns, these critics saw the matrix reporting format as akin to a “naming and shaming” enforcement mechanism. No leader wants to look bad by admitting to what might be perceived as failure. Officials from states that had blemished records did not want progress, or the lack therefore, in implementation to be recorded less they come under domestic political attack. Admitting to imperfection can also be bureaucratically unwise if it undermines internal support for nuclear security programs.³⁴ Some states were worried that such a matrix would show them at a disadvantage because they would be seen not to have done much. Some even suggested that there was little more for them to do, in that they had already acceded to the international commitments. Another argument raised against the mandatory reporting of commitments was that it would duplicate reporting requirements already imposed by UN Security Council Resolution 1540. Lurking behind this argument may have been a complaint that since non-nuclear weapon states bear a safeguards burden not imposed on the weapon states, the US should not be seeking to impose yet more nuclear transparency obligations. Some critics of the matrix format also had ideological reasons. Nuclear security is a sovereign responsibility. In light of the diverse approaches to implementation, the least common denominator is likely to be a free-form reporting method that has less utility to ensure high standards or to provide a comprehensive assessment.

The difficulty faced by the NSS sherpas in grappling with the issue of an assessment format is similar to the experience of the Global Partnership. In 2010, G-8 political leaders agreed that before deciding to continue with the program there should be an assessment of the Global Partnership’s efforts to date. A draft report of several pages was severely truncated, however, as member countries found it impossible to agree on any details. In the end, the partnership’s achievements in the field of nuclear security were summarized in three short and anodyne paragraphs.³⁵ This was enough to serve as a basis for renewing the commitment, but as an assessment vehicle it left much to be desired.

The role of the private sector in tracking progress

In the absence of an agreed method for tracking progress, the private sector can provide a useful alternative. In April 2011, a year after the Washington summit, two Washington-based organizations, the Arms Control Association and the Partnership for Global Security, teamed up to produce a 35-page report that tracked commitments made by 30 of the participating countries. The generally positive report concluded that approximately 60 percent of the reported national commitments had been completed, and that notable progress had been made on another 30 percent.³⁶ The scorecard was admittedly generous, in that it gave credit for accomplishments that were underway before the summit. However, the scorecard is analytically sound if the accomplishments were done in connection with the summit process, though that determination involved judgment calls. Russia got credit for ending plutonium production, for example, even though that effort had been in the pipeline for ten years.

Tracking commitments is important, but far more important is assessing actual nuclear security conditions. For most of the past decade, the Washington-based Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) commissioned an annual publication, *Securing the Bomb*, written by Matthew Bunn at the Harvard Belfer Center. The series provided a comprehensive assessment of global efforts to secure and consolidate nuclear stockpiles. The 2010 version documented, for example, that the US had helped remove all HEU from nearly 50 facilities around the world and that security and accounting upgrades have been completed at 210 of 250 or so weapons-usable nuclear material buildings in Russia and Eurasia.³⁷ The series provided the best available picture of the status of vulnerable nuclear material. Yet as a tool for tracking progress and comparing national conditions across a range of variables, the book format was imperfect.

In January 2012, NTI published the results of an alternative approach for assessing national conditions, partnering with the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit and a panel of nuclear security experts to develop a Nuclear Materials Security Index. The index compares a number of numerical indicators across 32 countries with at least one kilogram of weapons-usable nuclear materials and 144 countries with less than this quantity. The indicators chosen are broad and go well beyond the level of physical protection at relevant sites and the counting of the number of nuclear security treaties and conventions that countries have ratified. Voluntary commitments made and societal factors such as political stability and pervasiveness of corruption are also taken into account. The data is drawn from nongovernmental sources and international organizations. The 32 states that possess nuclear materials were also offered the opportunity to validate the data collected on their countries.

A positive result of this exercise is that the process of collecting information from governments can make them more aware of the nuclear terrorism threat.³⁸ But a lack of transparency means that many countries including China, India, and Pakistan are not as easily held accountable to their own citizens for nuclear security responsibilities. This lack of transparency also lowers their national index score. A quarter of the 32 states with nuclear materials score low on societal factors, highlighting the risk that corruption and political instability can abet diversion of nuclear materials. With the results of the NTI index published in time for the 2012 summit, they may provide guidance for international dialogue on defining nuclear security priorities beyond 2012. The results may also motivate countries to tailor their “house gifts” to areas identified as being in need of improvement.

CONCLUSION

It is important to keep nuclear security prominent on the international political agenda in the years ahead. The potential consequences of nuclear and radiological terrorist attacks are too high to justify complacency or to lack a high-level political mechanism that serves to accelerate existing nuclear security measures and initiatives. Following the Seoul summit, all attention will shift to the third meeting in the Netherlands. But beyond 2014, it remains open as to how this can be achieved, once world leaders deem nuclear security to be unworthy of their continued collective attention in the form of holding stand-alone, biannual summits. Including nuclear security on the agenda of G-8 and G-20 meetings or integrating the summit purpose into existing nuclear security initiatives such as GICINT may be the best compromise between allocating sufficient attention to nuclear security and keeping bureaucratic commitments justifiable. Meanwhile, in the absence of an official monitoring mechanism, civil society can take up the responsibility to systematically track nuclear security progress and to hold government to account in fulfilling the commitments of the 2010 work plan.

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US-Korea Institute at SAIS
Johns Hopkins University
1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, 6th Fl
Washington, DC 20036